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TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 3655
INFO RUCNCLS/ALL SOUTH AND CENTRAL ASIA COLLECTIVE
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 ASHGABAT 001371

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

STATE FOR SCA/CEN

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [SCUL](#) [SOCI](#) [TSPL](#) [TX](#)

SUBJECT: TURKMENISTAN: EDUCATION LAGGING IN MATH AND SCIENCES

REF: ASHGABAT 1078

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11. (U) Sensitive but Unclassified. Not for Public Internet.

12. (U) SUMMARY: The former Turkmen president's education policies resulted in poor quality secondary schools and insufficient professional education. The current president has reinstated the final year of secondary school and spent money on new buildings with the latest technology. However, the existing education system still values form and appearance over knowledge, and students are especially behind in math and science. END SUMMARY.

13. (SBU) Former President Niyazov began changing Turkmenistan's education system in 1993 and called for "improvements" to the education program to be based on Turkmen culture and traditions. The secondary school curriculum emphasized Turkmen history, Turkmen language and literature, and Niyazov's philosophical work, the Ruhnama. The changes eliminated the tenth year of secondary school education by cutting the science and math programs and abolishing physical education, art, and foreign languages as school courses, making them after-school activities instead.

14. (SBU) In January 2007, President Berdimuhamedov, recognizing the devastating effect of Niyazov's education policies, signed a decree, which brought back the tenth year of secondary school education and the courses which were abolished by his predecessor. In August 2009, Berdimuhamedov signed a new education law (reftel), which provided a legal framework for establishing private educational institutions at all levels of education. Presently, there are no private schools accredited in Turkmenistan. The Ashgabat International School, for instance, is not registered and its diplomas are not recognized by the Turkmen government.

15. (SBU) Over the past two years, the government has built dozens of modern, elite school buildings in Ashgabat and provincial cities. The schools are equipped with computers and modern teaching aids, such as Smart Boards. At the same time, the government has done nothing to renovate the existing schools. Teachers continue to fix

and paint classrooms at their own expense.

¶6. (SBU) In 2008, the government slightly increased teachers' salaries, but continued the practice of forcing teachers and students to attend long hours of government public ceremonies, leaving no spare time to prepare for their classes. To demonstrate the success of the government's education program, school administrators are not allowed to record a student's poor performance. As a result, all secondary school graduates receive diplomas, no matter how they did in school. Recently, the Ministry of Education conducted admission tests for Russian universities and technical colleges, which had agreed, based on a bilateral agreement, to accept 900 Turkmen students. According to a local source, only 160 students passed the tests in science and math. Part of the problem is a shortage of qualified teachers, but the major problem is the system itself which discourages and even penalizes teachers who are proactive and teach beyond the Ministry's recommendations.

¶7. (SBU) Parents who plan to send their children to study in foreign universities opt to hire private tutors to teach English, math, and science. Prices range from \$5 to \$10 per hour. (NOTE: The average monthly salary in Turkmenistan is reported to be \$200 a month. END NOTE.) Local contacts prefer science and math tutors to be retired teachers who came out of the Soviet education system with strong science and math programs.

¶8. (SBU) COMMENT: Berdimuhamedov's educational reforms have made only cosmetic changes to the ravaged education system. The government continues to focus on bricks and mortar, but neglects curriculum reform and improving the quality of teaching. END COMMENT.

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